

VZCZCXRO2415
OO RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK
DE RUEHLB #1849/01 1591530
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 081530Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3951
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 0215
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIRUT 001849

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/SINGH/WERNER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/08/2026
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IR](#) [RS](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: SAAD HARIRI ON IRAN, SINIORA, AOUN,
HIZBALLAH, ELECTION LAW

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (S) In a 6/7 meeting with the Ambassador, MP Saad Hariri spent most of the time discussing his recent travels in Europe, which he claimed to have used to push for international consensus on Iran and Syria. The Russians, he claimed, were persuaded by his arguments not to abstain on any UNSCR resolutions regarding Iran and even hinted at military action. The Russians also told Hariri that they would not protect Syrian President Bashar al-Asad. Regarding the homefront, Hariri was harshly critical of the draft election law, vowing to oppose the draft's mixed constituencies in favor of uniform acceptance of small (qada) districts. Responding to the Ambassador's comments that he needed to fix his relationship with Prime Minister Siniora, Hariri agreed. But he added ominously that Siniora "needs to know who's boss." Hariri dismissed rumors that he was interested in accelerating his assumption of the premiership, maintaining the linkage between his potential ascension to office to President Emile Lahoud's departure -- if then. Asked how he could maintain his political strength while feuding simultaneously with Michel Aoun and Hizballah, he expressed more interest and optimism in improving relations with Hizballah than with the Aounist camp. End summary.

READ-OUT ON MEETING WITH PUTIN

12. (S) Just off the plane and in Beirut for the first time in more than three weeks, Hariri told the Ambassador that he had used his travels in France, Germany, Russia, and elsewhere to try to build consensus for UNSC action regarding Iran and Syria. He spent most of the hour-long meeting discussing his Russian trip. "You should thank me," he said; "I was doing your work for you." He claimed that, over more than two hours of discussion, he convinced Putin not to abstain on any Iran-related UNSCRs and not to repeat Russia's abstention on Syria-related UNSCRs. Putin agreed, Hariri insisted, that Russia is threatened by Iran's nuclear ambitions and should not simply stand by in hopes that others will solve the problem. As for Russia's relations with Syria, Hariri claimed that Putin complained that Bashar had made too many mistakes. Russia will not protect Bashar or the Asad regime, according to Hariri.

IVANOV, SOLTANOV, AND PRIMAKOV
REASSURE HARIRI ON SYRIA, IRAN

13. (S) Hariri reported that his separate meetings with Foreign Minister Ivanov, Deputy Foreign Minister Soltanov, and former Prime Minister Primakov were more interesting and detailed than with Putin, regarding both Iran and Syria. Ivanov said that he had passed a message to the Syrians pointing out that Russia's abstention on UNSCR 1680 should not be confused with a veto: Russia had reasons to abstain, but Russia expected Syria to comply fully with the resolution. Soltanov told Hariri that Bashar al-Asad's only choice was to follow the example of Libya and "give up the generals," a comment that led Hariri to conclude that the Russians have decided that the SARG is complicit in Rafiq Hariri's murder.

14. (S) Primakov relayed for Saad a story of his experience visiting Rafiq Hariri four days before Hariri's murder. Rafiq asked Primakov to convey a message to Bashar that he would protect Syrian interests in Lebanon and avoid a peace treaty with Israel, if Bashar would agree to remove his intelligence operatives from Beirut, redeploy the Syrian army to the Biqa'a Valley, and let the GOL function freely and in accordance with the Taif agreement. Bashar, Primakov said, welcomed this message. In Primakov's view, that positive response suggested that Bashar was not part of the plot to kill Rafiq, even if his inner circle was involved.

15. (S) Primakov said that he included this anecdote and analysis in a recent book he authored and also included it in a series of interviews taped to be broadcast on a new Arabic-language Russian television network aimed at the Middle East. Hariri said that Primakov laughed that the interviewer, a Syrian named Akram Huzam, was nervous that Primakov's comments about Syrian complicity could get his family in trouble back home. Primakov told Huzam that, by

BEIRUT 00001849 002 OF 004

the time the interview broadcasts in November, Bashar would be out. Hariri said that he thought Primakov, while joking, was sending him a serious message. In Hariri's view, Primakov has so many ties to Damascus that, for him to predict Bashar's ouster, the Russians must have fairly strong evidence that the SARG murdered his father. Hariri said that he was struck by the change of attitude by the Russians, who previously would only tell him to wait for the results of the UNIIIC.

16. (S) On Iran, Ivanov complained to Hariri that Iran was trying to behave as if it were a superpower, behavior the Russians found inexplicable. After all, Ivanov said, Iran does not have a delivery mechanism to hit either "the big devil" (the United States) or the "little devil" (Israel). So Iran must be trying to rearrange the regional balance, a posture which the Russians find unacceptable. Hariri said that Ivanov was clear that Russia will not allow Iran to become a nuclear power, even if -- "write this down," Hariri asked the Ambassador -- prevention requires a "surgical intervention." Hariri said that he was convinced that Russia will participate actively in a solution to the Iranian nuclear issue, perhaps even to the point of participating in a military strike.

CHIRAC WARNS HARIRI
NOT TO RETURN HOME

17. (S) Turning to France, Hariri said that, over the last two weeks, he met with French President Jacques Chirac twice -- once before and once after seeing Putin -- and also joined Putin in a conference call to Chirac. Hariri said that Chirac was pleased with his Russian diplomacy. Chirac also warned Hariri not to return to Lebanon, out of fear that he will be killed if he does. The Ambassador asked Hariri whether he thought Chirac had specific threat information against him, or whether Chirac was relying on intuition. Hariri responded that he thought France had specific

information, although it was not shared with him. (We will ask French Ambassador Emie about this.) But Hariri said that he was not listening to Chirac in this regard. "I need to be here," he said, saying that he planned to remain in Beirut indefinitely, even after the conclusion of the June 8 National Dialogue session.

EMPHASIZING STATE-BUILDING
IN THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

18. (C) On the National Dialogue, Hariri noted only that the March 14 participants would meet that evening to coordinate their positions. "The people of Walid (Jumblatt) has done an excellent job," Hariri said, referring to a paper being circulated among the March 14 participants that emphasizes the need for state-building. This, according to Hariri, would be the major argument used by the March 14 participants in the Dialogue session to respond to Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah's earlier presentation. Nasrallah's defense of the arms of the "resistance" is completely contrary to the notion of state-building, Hariri explained, "and the Lebanese want a state."

HARIRI OPPOSES DRAFT ELECTION LAW

19. (C) The Ambassador asked Hariri's views of the draft election law submitted recently to the cabinet. Frowning while aggressively flicking cigar ashes into one of several oversized crystal ashtrays surrounding his chair, Hariri vowed to fight the draft. "I told (PM) Siniora this was a mistake," he said. The problem is the districting: the draft law uses for some seats proportional voting in large (muhafaza) districts. Hariri said that he has "always" supported relying exclusively on small qada districts. He said that, by coming out in favor of the qada approach, he would regain Christian support, embarrass Aoun (who would have to recognize that the Christians generally support the qada approach), and "screw Hizballah." Walid Jumblatt and Maronite Patriarch Sfeir already agree with him, and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, seeing the qada as providing him a chance to emerge from Hizballah's shadow, will also endorse qada-based voting.

110. (C) The Ambassador noted that the draft law does rely on the qada for the majority of the seats, distributed across

BEIRUT 00001849 003 OF 004

the country, and that the proportional voting allowed for the others should allow Hariri to pick up seats in places like Zahle, which he lost in the 2005 elections. "I will win Zahle next time," he said; "you'll see." Hariri showed no flexibility regarding the districting question. The Ambassador noted that the draft law contains many other positive ideas on financing, transparency, publicity, etc. that risk being lost if the draft law is rejecting on the districting question. The Ambassador pushed Hariri to make it clear that, even if he did not agree with the districting, he supported the rest of the electoral reforms in the law. Hariri did not respond.

THREATS AGAINST SINIORA AND HARIRI
SHOULD ENCOURAGE MORE COOPERATION

111. (C) The Ambassador expressed concern about the deterioration in the relations between Hariri and PM Siniora. He noted the 5/25 article in al-Hayat by Syria's Ambassador to Washington Imad Mustapha; Hariri's lack of defense of Siniora had been a disappointment. Hariri agreed that the article was an implied threat, but he said that he was worried about his own safety. "Look at the Syrian press," he said. The Syrians, according to Hariri, were accusing him of having financing the Syrian opposition meeting in London. This, Hariri said, was a more serious threat than that posed

by the Mustapha article to Siniora. The Ambassador responded that was all the more reason for Hariri to rebuild his partnership with Siniora, to display solidarity in the face of a unified Syrian campaign against March 14 leaders. To regain the initiative both inside and outside Lebanon, the March 14 group must be unified, starting with the PM and Hariri.

HARIRI SUGGESTS SINIORA DOESN'T LISTEN

¶12. (C) Hariri said that he knew the problems had to be fixed between him and Siniora, and he noted that he had spoken by phone with Siniora recently for the first time in weeks. He said that the two of them would sit down together after the Dialogue, to coordinate positions and agendas. But Siniora, Hariri said, "needs to know who's boss." Siniora "doesn't listen to what I want," Hariri complained, referring back to the draft election law and raising the (increasingly tiresome) controversy surrounding the appointments to the Higher Judicial Council. The Ambassador responded that Siniora is the Prime Minister of Lebanon and probably resents being talked to as if he is a servant. Hariri claimed not to get involved in the day-to-day management of the government. "I give Fouad space," he said, only intervening of issues of great importance. The Ambassador argued that they needed a genuine partnership, for the sake of Lebanon and for the sake of Hariri's political strength. "We'll work it out," Siniora insisted, "but Fouad has to remember who I am."

SAAD RULES OUT EARLY PREMIERSHIP

¶13. (C) The Ambassador asked Hariri what the alternatives were to restoration of a genuine Hariri-Siniora partnership. Picking up the Ambassador's meaning, Hariri said that, rumors to the contrary notwithstanding, he will not assume the premiership himself until Emile Lahoud has left the presidency. While some people argue that Hariri should take it now rather than risk becoming irrelevant by the time Lahoud leaves office, Hariri said that taking the premiership now is a bigger trap. Lahoud will block his initiatives, making him look weak and ineffective. Better to wait until he can implement his agenda, which requires waiting for a new president. Besides, Hariri said, "I'm not all that eager to become Prime Minister. Maybe I'll never take it. Why do I need this pain?"

HIZBALLAH AN EASIER SELL THAN AOUN

¶14. (C) The Ambassador emphasized again the need for Hariri to rebuild the partnership with Siniora. Now, the Ambassador pointed out, Hariri is feuding with his PM, he has no contact with Michel Aoun, his March 14 Christian allies do not trust him, and he has come to realize the futility of trying to build a partnership with Hizballah. It is impossible, the Ambassador said, for Hariri to maintain power and influence with so many enemies. Sighing, Hariri vowed again to fix the

BEIRUT 00001849 004 OF 004

relationship with Siniora and said that he was addressing the Christian concerns (which he found exaggerated and annoying) in a variety of ways. He expressed confidence that the Christians would soon be back with him. When the Ambassador urged him to try to build bridges to Aoun at least on shared tactical interests, Hariri said that he would be able to rebuild cooperation with Hizballah first. The Ambassador expressed astonishment and consternation, noting that Hizballah is a foreign front organization with a worrying and dangerous agenda for Lebanon far different than that of Hariri. "Aoun is a bigger Iranian agent than Nasrallah," Hariri growled. He complained of Aoun's "constant lies about me."

COMMENT

¶15. (C) We know that some of Saad's closest advisors -- who earlier participated in the Siniora-bashing that had been sadly too prevalent in the Hariri "royal court" -- now recognize that there is no choice: Saad and Siniora must rebuild their partnership. Saad should not speak to Siniora as if the latter were a hired hand, and Siniora must not patronize Saad as if he is indulging an inexperienced little boy. The French, British, Russian, Saudi, and Egyptian Ambassadors are all joining us in making the same point to Saad. With Siniora now back from an official trip to Turkey, we will continue to try to work with both men to promote a genuine reconciliation.

¶16. (C) Besides sounding as though he was treating Siniora as a servant, Saad made two additional comments in this meeting that disturbed us. First, he was, in our view, too quick to dismiss the election law draft drawn up by a blue-ribbon panel of experts. The districting question that he raised is the highest-profile issue in the draft, but it is not the most important. We will continue, along with our partners in the NGO and international community, to press Lebanon's political leaders to retain the draft's transparency, media, and financing rules, even if politics require a change in districting. The other disturbing comment Saad made concerned Hizballah. Whatever Aoun's faults are -- and they are many -- Hizballah's are worse. To the extent that he is willing to build bridges, Saad needs to reach out to Aoun before trying anything with Hizballah. And, of course, he needs a solid bridge to his PM first of all.

FELTMAN